

LINKING THE FEELING WITH COPING TIPS AND DISTRACTIONS HAND-OUT

Using alternatives to self-harm will help your young person get through an intense moment when they may feel a strong urge to hurt themselves. But it's never going to be easy, especially when they are trying to break the cycle for the first time. Doing something like squeezing ice won't cure the roots of the distress, but it may help them to use a more productive coping mechanism and show them that they can cope with stress in a less harmful way. They will have to make a conscious effort to not hurt themselves, but the important thing is that if they do decide to use an alternative, they made that choice themselves.

If you cut to express pain and intense emotions:

- Paint, draw, or scribble on a big piece of paper with red ink or paint
- Express your feelings in a journal
- Compose a poem or song to say what you feel
- Write down any negative feelings and then rip the paper up
- Listen to music that expresses what you're feeling

If you cut to calm and soothe yourself:

- Take a bath or hot shower
- Pet or cuddle with a dog or cat
- Wrap yourself in a warm blanket
- Massage your neck, hands, and feet
- Listen to calming music

If you cut because you feel disconnected and numb:

- Call a friend (you don't have to talk about self-harm)
- Take a cold shower
- Hold an ice cube in the crook of your arm or leg
- Chew something with a very strong taste, like chili peppers, peppermint, or a grapefruit peel.
- Go online to a self-help website, chat room, or message board

If you cut to release tension or vent anger:

- Exercise vigorously—run, dance, jump rope or hit a punching bag
- Punch a cushion or mattress or scream into your pillow
- Squeeze a stress ball or squish Play-Doh or clay
- Rip something up (sheets of paper, a magazine)
- Make some noise (play an instrument, bang on pots and pans)



LISTENING TIPS HAND-OUT

1. Stop Talking! It is difficult to listen and speak at the same time.
2. Put the other person at ease. Give them space and time and “permission” to speak their piece. How we look at them, how we stand or sit, makes a huge difference. Relax, and let them relax as well.
3. Show the other person that you want to hear them. Look at them. Nod when you can agree, ask them to explain further if you don’t understand. Listen to understand them and their words, rather than just for your turn.
4. Remove distractions. Good listening means being willing to turn off the TV, close a door, or stop reading your texts. Give the young person your full attention, and let them know they are getting your full attention.
5. Empathize with the young person. Especially if they are telling you something personal or painful, or something you intensely disagree with, take a moment to stand in their shoes, to look at the situation from their point of view.
6. Be patient. Some people take longer to find the right word, to make a point or clarify an issue. Give the young person time to get it all out before you jump in with your reply.
7. Watch your own emotions. If what they are saying creates an emotional response in you, be extra careful to listen carefully, with attention to the intent and full meaning of their words. When we are angry, frightened or upset, we often miss critical parts of what is being said to us.
8. Be very slow to disagree, criticize or argue. Even if you disagree, let them have their point of view. If you respond in a way that makes the other person defensive, even if you “win” the argument, you may lose something far more valuable!
9. Ask a question. Ask the young person to clarify, to say more, give an example, or explain further. It will help them speak more precisely and it will help you hear and understand them more accurately.



The A-Z of distractions

Often the best thing is to find out what has worked for other people who understand where you're coming from. TheSite.org asked young people from young people's mental health service 42nd Street to come up with some of the alternatives that help them.

Here is the list A-Z

- Alternative therapies: massage, reiki, meditation, acupuncture, aromatherapy
- Bake or cook something tasty
- Clean (and won't your folks/housemates be pleased!)
- Craftwork: make things, draw or paint
- Dance your socks off
- Eat sweets or chocolate for an instant sugar rush (but be careful of the dip in your mood once it's over)
- Exercise for a release of endorphins and that feel-good factor
- Forward planning - concentrate on something in the future, like a holiday
- Go for a walk
- Go online and look at websites that offer you advice and information
- Hang out with friends and family
- Have a bubble bath with lots of bath bombs fizzing around you
- Have a good cry
- Hug a soft toy
- Invite a friend round
- Join a gym or a club
- Knit (it's not just for old people you know)
- Listen to music
- Moisturise
- Music: singing, playing instruments, listening to (basically making as much noise as you can)
- Open up to a friend or family member about how you are feeling
- Pop bubble wrap
- Phone a helpline or a friend
- Play computer games
- Play with a stress ball or make one yourself
- Read a book
- Rip up a phone directory (does anyone actually use them these days?)
- Scream into an empty room
- Shop scanning – looking on line
- Spend time with babies (when they're in a good mood)
- Tell or listen to jokes
- Use the internet
- Visit a zoo or a farm (animals do the best things)
- Volunteer for an organisation (will make you feel all warm inside)
- Watch TV or films - particularly comedies
- Write: diary, poems, a book
- Write negative feelings on paper, then rip them up
- Yoga: meditation, deep breathing - this might help you relax and control your urges
- Zzz - get a good night's sleep



